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## DEWEY AT MANILA BAY

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### Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral

*Commander Derek B. Granger, U.S. Navy*

On the night of 30 April 1898, the six-ship U.S. Asiatic Squadron, commanded by Commodore George Dewey, steamed into Manila Bay in the Spanish Philippines to do battle with the Spanish South Pacific Squadron. In less than seven hours Dewey sank or captured the entire Spanish fleet and silenced Manila's shore batteries, all while suffering just eight wounded and without the loss of a single American life.<sup>1</sup> Dewey's success in a distant bay most Americans could not have pointed to on a map transformed the United States into a colonial power, causing Europe to take note.<sup>2</sup> An editorial in a German newspaper observed that Dewey's victory marked "a new epoch in history, not only for the United States but likewise for Europe."<sup>3</sup>

In light of the dramatic change to the world political landscape brought by Manila Bay, it is notable how little attention Dewey's exploits receive today from students of naval history. Perhaps the passage of 113 years since Dewey's victory has led historians to conclude that his accomplishments, though impressive for their day, are irrelevant to students of operational art marked now by satellite surveillance and cruise missiles. If that is the case, however, why should service colleges pay attention to the accomplishments of Napoleon Bonaparte, Ferdinand Foch, or Raymond Spruance? Are not their achievements little more than historical curiosities in an age of globalism, stealth technology, and smart weapons?

Worse, it would seem, Dewey—like most of his contemporaries (and many naval leaders who followed him over the next half-century)—subscribed to another historical curiosity, the Mahanian theory of engaging and decisively defeating the enemy battle fleet. His victory at Manila, in fact, was arguably a prime example of Mahanian warfare. The subsequent discrediting of Mahanian tactics

has rendered Dewey irrelevant to many students of modern naval warfare. Furthermore, Dewey's action against the Spanish at Manila Bay involved only six fighting ships and so hardly represents the operational level of war at all using more recent yardsticks. When compared to the forces commanded by Nimitz and Spruance at Midway, Dewey's was little more than a tactical detachment. In this view, Dewey's accomplishments are worthy of study only inasmuch as they demonstrate his thorough mastery of Mahanian tactics. Referring to the American victories at Manila Bay and Santiago, Cuba, during the Spanish-American War, historian Ronald Andidora submits that the "small size of these engagements and the disproportionate material advantage enjoyed by the Americans in each of them rendered their instructional value almost nil."<sup>4</sup>

But in fact the basic tenets of operational leadership and operational art are timeless. Napoleon, Foch, and Spruance—and Mahan too—are indeed worthy of study by today's students of warfare, and so is Dewey. Dewey's operational leadership and his practice of operational art are relevant to twenty-first-century practitioners of the operational level of war. In making this argument, this article details how America's first "Admiral of the Navy"—in effect, its first fleet admiral—won the battle of Manila Bay before the first round was fired, by carefully incorporating into his campaign planning the operational functions of intelligence, command and control, logistics, and protection so as to mitigate adverse circumstances related to the operational factors of time, space, and force.

## PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

At 5:41 AM on 1 May 1898, sixty-year-old Commodore George Dewey cemented his place in history books with his famous command to the captain of his flagship, the protected cruiser USS *Olympia* (C-6): "You may fire when you are ready, Gridley."<sup>5</sup> Over the next seven hours, the American line of battle made five firing runs past the numerically superior Spanish squadron, commanded by Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo and riding at anchor in Manila Bay beneath the cover of heavy shore-based batteries. Suffering 381 dead and the destruction of most of his fleet, Montojo had little choice but to surrender to Dewey's virtually undamaged force, handing America what amounted to total victory.<sup>6</sup> While the events of 1 May 1898 were unquestionably decisive, the American victory had been for all practical purposes assured before Dewey and his squadron steamed into Manila Bay. As Dewey observed shortly after his victory, "This battle was won in Hong Kong Harbor."<sup>7</sup>

Early that year, on 3 January, with the specter of war with Spain over alleged Spanish atrocities in Cuba looming, Commodore Dewey had assumed command of the Asiatic Squadron in a ceremony on board *Olympia* at Nagasaki, Japan. While the six-ship squadron under Dewey's command was small compared

to the fleets later amassed during World War II, it was a sizable and formidable naval force for the day, especially for a U.S. Navy that was only now expanding following a considerable downsizing in the decades following the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Dewey, after the required diplomatic proprieties with his Japanese hosts, ordered his squadron on 11 February to make for Hong Kong, having received no direction from higher authority to do so but realizing that it would put his force in the most advantageous position from which to mount an offensive against the Spanish fleet.<sup>9</sup> Upon the squadron's arrival at Hong Kong on 17 February, he was greeted with news of the sinking of the USS *Maine* only two days prior in Havana Harbor, nearly halfway around the world. In the relative safety of Hong Kong's neutral harbor, Dewey wasted no time preparing for war with a fading but still dangerous colonial power.

First and foremost, Dewey was facing enormous logistical challenges associated with the operational factor of *space*. Various plans for war with Spain drafted in the 1890s called for the U.S. Asiatic Squadron to seek out and destroy the Spanish navy in the Spanish Philippines.<sup>10</sup> Adopting these general plans, Dewey realized his force would be operating more than seven thousand miles from his nearest base, which meant it would take nearly two months to transport coal, ammunition, and reserves into the theater. He also realized that a formal declaration of war by the United States would render neutral ports, including Hong Kong and all ports in Japan, off-limits in accordance with international law, increasing his logistical concerns by compressing the operational factor of *time*. Dewey had to make all preparations he could while in Hong Kong, a task complicated by the fact that his every move was readily observable to the civilian vessels and foreign warships plying the harbor.<sup>11</sup>

Of equal concern to Dewey was that the Spanish navy would be fighting in its own waters and within easy range of numerous, heavily fortified Spanish bases. In contrast, shortly after his appointment to the Asiatic Squadron, Dewey became painfully aware of the inadequacy of U.S. intelligence on the region when his request for information about the Philippines was answered with a sorely outdated 1876 report from the Office of Naval Intelligence.<sup>12</sup> The Office of Naval Intelligence was certainly not alone in being unprepared for war in the Philippines. Prior to the sinking of *Maine*, even President William McKinley confessed, "I could not have told where those darned islands were within 2,000 miles."<sup>13</sup>

Dewey's challenges in the operational factors of space and time were exacerbated by yet others concerning the factor of *force*. Many historians have argued that Dewey commanded a fleet that was, in nearly every aspect, vastly superior to Montojo's. Dewey's autobiography acknowledges that he perceived a distinct advantage in armament over his Spanish adversaries, mounting as he did fifty-three "large guns" (above four inches) to thirty-one for the Spanish.<sup>14</sup> A critical

deficiency faced by Dewey, however, was in the quantity of vessels available. Although Dewey's force of six combatants was slightly less than Montojo's seven, the Spanish had more than twenty-five small gunboats that could mount a serious threat if brought into action.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, rumors circulated in Hong Kong regarding the impregnability of Spanish shore defenses at Manila, a formidable arsenal of more than 225 guns, many of heavy caliber.<sup>16</sup> In all, prospects for victory looked grim for Dewey's Asiatic Squadron; the exclusive Hong Kong Club offered heavy betting odds against the Americans.<sup>17</sup> Only days before war was formally declared, British officers of the Royal Navy entertained their American guests with a sort of farewell party. When it concluded, a British officer commented, "What a very fine set of fellows. But unhappily, we shall never see them again."<sup>18</sup>

### DEWEY'S GROWTH INTO AN OPERATIONAL LEADER

The manner in which Dewey proceeded in preparing for battle despite poor odds and considerable difficulties attests to his qualities and effectiveness as an operational leader. Milan Vego, a modern scholar of the history and practice of operational art, contends, "The principal requirements for a successful operational leader are high intellect, strong personality, courage, boldness, and will to act, combined with extensive professional knowledge and experience."<sup>19</sup> All of these traits, as well as others, applied in various degrees to Dewey. His boldness and experience, however, were the primary influences on his planning and execution at Manila Bay.

By the time he was appointed to command of the Asiatic Squadron, Dewey was already renowned for his boldness. When his prestigious appointment produced outspoken criticism by some who favored other officers, Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt was undeterred. Addressing a protesting delegation of California congressmen, Roosevelt declared, "Gentlemen, I can't agree with you. We have looked up his record. We have looked him straight in the eyes. He is a fighter. We'll not change now."<sup>20</sup>

Dewey's boldness had emerged from experience. Within three years of his graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1858, Dewey was assigned to the side-wheel steam frigate USS *Mississippi*. When the American Civil War broke out, *Mississippi* was assigned to the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, commanded by David Glasgow Farragut. Dewey's first engagement was Farragut's attack on New Orleans, just one of several successful and high-profile endeavors that were to distinguish Farragut as an aggressive and bold commander. Though not assigned to Farragut's flagship, USS *Hartford*, Dewey was able to observe Farragut's leadership style closely and quickly became a "disciple." One of Farragut's tactics, employed to considerable effectiveness at New Orleans, was to pass heavily fortified shore

positions at night. This experience would prove pivotal to Dewey at Manila Bay.

Following the capture of New Orleans, Dewey learned from Farragut another lasting lesson, this time on initiative. After weeks of trying, a Confederate gunboat slipped passed the Union blockade, prompting Farragut to assemble his commanding officers and others on board *Hartford*. Dewey, by then *Mississippi*'s executive officer, attended. After all the officers were seated, Farragut demanded an explanation of how the gunboat had snuck by. A junior officer from another ship, who had been officer of the deck the night the incident occurred, spoke out, admitting, "I could have rammed her, sir, only I was awaiting orders." Farragut, visibly disgusted, replied quietly, "Young man, you had the opportunity to make a great name for yourself in your profession, but you missed it. I doubt that you will get another."<sup>21</sup> Dewey would not miss his own opportunity when the time came.

Some two years after his success at New Orleans, Farragut led a similarly bold attack on Mobile, Alabama. As Farragut's ships proceeded up the channel between Forts Gaines and Morgan, USS *Tecumseh* hit a mine (referred to during that period as a "torpedo") and sank almost immediately. Behind *Tecumseh*, USS *Brooklyn* stopped in the channel and backed its engines, prompting Farragut to yell down from his position in the rigging of *Hartford*, "What's the trouble?" When the reply from *Brooklyn* came back, "Torpedoes!" Farragut abruptly and famously issued what would become his signature command: "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!"<sup>22</sup> Although Dewey was not present at the battle of Mobile Bay, there is no doubt he was deeply impressed by reports of Farragut's intrepidity in the face of the enemy.

In his autobiography Dewey admitted, "Farragut has always been my ideal of the naval officer: urbane, decisive, indomitable. Whenever I have been in a difficult situation, or in the midst of such confusion of details that the simple and right thing to do seemed hazy, I have often asked myself, 'What would Farragut do?' In the course of the preparations for Manila Bay I often asked myself this question."<sup>23</sup> Unsurprisingly, his response would be very Farragut-like.

## DEWEY'S CAMPAIGN PLAN

Having distinguished himself as a bold leader during his Civil War service, Dewey would now distinguish himself as a well prepared commander. His preparations for war with Spain commenced even before he arrived in Nagasaki to take command of the Asiatic Squadron. Receiving notification of his pending appointment while serving as the president of the Board of Inspection and Survey in Washington, Dewey immediately and exhaustively studied charts on the Far East, placing particular emphasis on the Philippines.<sup>24</sup> Keenly attuned to the challenges of sustainment inherent in operating so far from his closest base, he

undertook an investigation into the readiness of the ships assigned to his prospective squadron.

His findings were disturbing: not one ship had even a full peacetime allowance for ammunition and powder, let alone a wartime allowance.<sup>25</sup> Upon being informed by the Department of the Navy that merchant steamers would not transport ammunition, due to safety concerns, Dewey worked with Roosevelt to have additional ammunition shipped via the USS *Concord*, outfitting at Mare Island, near Oakland, California, for service with the Asiatic Squadron.<sup>26</sup> Demonstrating exceptional foresight and resourcefulness, he stopped by Mare Island on his journey west, calling on the commanding officer of *Concord* to persuade him to minimize all supplies save his squadron's badly needed ammunition, maximizing every inch of storage capacity for that purpose.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Dewey recommended revising *Concord's* track across the Pacific to include a brief stop for coal in Hawaii, allowing the ship to make it to Japan, where additional stores could be easily procured.<sup>28</sup> Realizing that *Concord* was too small to carry more than half the required ammunition, Dewey arranged for the sloop of war USS *Mohican* to transport the balance. The speed in which these logistical arrangements were made was critical: *Mohican* arrived in Hong Kong only forty-eight hours before Dewey took his squadron to sea en route to Manila Bay.<sup>29</sup>

Dewey's other chief logistical concern while at Hong Kong was coal. Dewey was well aware that with the news of *Maine's* sinking at Havana, war with Spain was imminent. Faced with the inevitable prospect of then being directed by the British authorities to depart Hong Kong and having no American bases available, Dewey undertook discreet negotiations to purchase merchant colliers to provide floating support. Obtaining Secretary of the Navy John Davis Long's approval, Dewey purchased the British merchant ships *Nanshan* and *Zafiro* and obtained the revenue cutter McCulloch. Dewey, however, disobeyed Long's orders to arm these newly acquired auxiliaries, choosing instead, rather ingeniously, to register them as American merchants cleared for Guam, in 1898 an exceedingly remote island that Dewey regarded as an "almost mythical country."<sup>30</sup> Additionally, he elected to hire the British crews and leave them intact, augmenting them with only small contingents of U.S. Navy personnel. His efforts ensured that these vital support vessels would not be ordered to leave the safety of Hong Kong upon the official declaration of war, as well as their freedom to resupply in Japanese and Chinese ports.<sup>31</sup>

Another critical consideration for Dewey was the operational movement of his forces. With fully half of his ships then considerable distances from Hong Kong (USS *Petrel* was in the Bering Sea on fishery-protection service), Dewey had to assemble them rapidly for redistribution of ammunition, bunkering, tactical planning, dry docking for structural repairs, repainting of ships (grey, from peacetime white), and the countless other preparations required for battle.<sup>32</sup>



Effective use of transoceanic telegraph cables brought about the expeditious arrival of all his warships at Hong Kong, though USS *Baltimore* arrived from Honolulu only on 22 April, two days before the governor of neutral Hong Kong requested the withdrawal of all American ships.<sup>33</sup>

Even while collecting his force in Hong Kong, Dewey had embarked on an intelligence campaign to assist him in devising his plans for war. On 23 April, Dewey sent a coded cablegram to O. F. Williams, the U.S. consul at Manila, requesting information on Manila's defenses, the presence of mines, and Spanish fleet movements.<sup>34</sup> Despite a very real threat to his safety from the Spanish authorities, Williams responded with a report of the mounting of six new, heavy guns at Corregidor, the laying of mines in Manila Bay, the disposition of Spanish surface forces, and efforts to fortify land positions.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Williams relayed rumors from the streets of Manila detailing the organization of a coalition European naval force being sent to defeat the Americans.<sup>36</sup> Dewey also used his own officers to gather intelligence, sending them ashore in Hong Kong disguised as tourists or businessmen to obtain information from steamers arriving from the Philippines. Through this method, Dewey heard of a policy requiring ships entering the Corregidor channel to use Spanish pilots because of heavy mining.<sup>37</sup> Having acquired knowledge of the currents and water depths in Subic and Manila Bays, Dewey deduced that extensive mining of the channels into either port would be problematic for the Spanish and that the countless reports of mines were nothing more than a ruse to deter attack.<sup>38</sup> Through his deliberate analysis of the information collected through this combination of highly resourceful, if amateur, intelligence-gathering methods, Dewey obtained a surprisingly accurate picture of what awaited him in Manila. In a cable to Secretary Long sent on 31 March, fully a month before the battle of Manila Bay, Dewey outlined with remarkable precision the Spanish naval and land forces at Manila, concluding with confidence that he could take Manila in a single day.<sup>39</sup>

Enabled by his productive intelligence campaign, Dewey now set out to finalize his battle plans. According to modern U.S. joint doctrine, the preparation of battle plans is one of several tasks encompassed by the command-and-control function, along with communicating the status of information, assessing the situation, and commanding subordinate forces. If Dewey had learned boldness during the Civil War, his planning was deliberate, thorough, and cautious. Somewhat surprisingly, his planning process was very much a collaborative affair, drawing extensively from the inputs of his subordinate commanders. "Day after day, he summoned his captains to discuss all the possibilities and eventualities of a conflict with the enemy. He gave them an opportunity to say when, where, and how the battle should be fought. From junior to senior he called upon them to express their opinions freely. If any man had a novel idea, it was



given careful consideration.”<sup>40</sup> In assessing Dewey’s command and control practices, an officer serving under Dewey in the Philippines observed that Dewey “had the respect and confidence of every officer and man who served under him.” He added, “Prior to leaving Hong Kong, every contingency which might arise was considered and studied, and plans made to meet each one, so that when the time actually came to engage the enemy’s fleet, we had a prearranged plan which fitted the case perfectly.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite the absence of an official proclamation of war by the United States, the governor of Hong Kong sent word to Dewey on 24 April that British neutrality necessitated the departure of all American ships within twenty-four hours. Dewey did not bother to wait for the full twenty-four hours to elapse, for by that time he had essentially completed combat preparations and the bold plan that would be executed to near perfection less than a week later.

Having closely studied China, Dewey correctly surmised that so loosely organized a nation as it then was would be unable to enforce neutrality laws. That consideration prompted him to steam his squadron from Hong Kong to Mirs Bay, an anchorage in Chinese territory thirty miles from Hong Kong.<sup>42</sup> There he meticulously oversaw final preparations, including such details as jettisoning decorative woodwork from all of his ships to reduce the threat of splinters and fire and draping chains over the sides of the ships to serve, to some degree, as armor.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, he relentlessly drilled his forces in critical skills like target practice and damage control, as well as in skills less likely to be needed, like hand-to-hand combat.

In the midst of all of the activity, on the morning of 27 April, a small tug entered Mirs Bay to deliver an urgent cablegram from Secretary Long: “War has commenced between the United States and Spain. Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations, particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavors.”<sup>44</sup> At once, Dewey summoned all commanding officers for a final meeting on board *Olympia* to discuss the latest intelligence on Manila and Subic Bays and promulgate what would now be called his “commander’s guidance.” Less than three hours after receiving Secretary Long’s cable, the Asiatic Squadron steamed from Mirs Bay to seek out the Spanish fleet some six hundred miles away. Dewey had little chance of achieving the element of surprise, however, as the Spanish consul at Hong Kong informed Montojo by cable that “the enemy’s squadron sailed at 2 PM from the Bay of Mirs, and according to reliable accounts they sailed for Subic Bay to destroy our squadron and then will go to Manila.”<sup>45</sup> That is precisely what Dewey did, arriving first at Subic and dispatching two vessels to reconnoiter for the Spanish fleet before continuing on to Manila Bay, reaching it in the early morning of 1 May 1898.

Mahanian doctrine presumably led Dewey to consider the Spanish fleet as the enemy center of gravity. While he was confident that his own squadron's morale, training readiness, and superior projectile weight would give him a decided advantage over the Spanish fleet, he had serious concerns regarding the heavy shore batteries overlooking the approaches to Manila Bay. Dewey observed in his autobiography, "If the guns commanding the entrance were well served, there was danger of damage to my squadron before it engaged the enemy's squadron."<sup>46</sup> Through his experience at the Board of Inspection and Survey and his study of Mahanian doctrine, he was fully aware of the effectiveness of modern guns when fired from a stationary position and of the legitimacy of Mahan's maxim that one shore-based gun was the equal of four guns of similar caliber afloat.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, his plan focused heavily on operational protection and passive defensive measures intended to neutralize this critical Spanish strength. First, Dewey decided to enter Manila Bay through Boca Grande, the wider of the two entrances, to maximize the separation between his squadron and the batteries.<sup>48</sup> Second, Dewey planned to complicate targeting by entering the bay at night, with all navigation lights extinguished.<sup>49</sup> As a result, despite Montojo's excellent intelligence on the movement of the American squadron and the advantageous positions of his powerful shore batteries, the Spanish failed to engage the U.S. ships until they were very nearly inside Manila Bay, even then firing only a couple of rounds, with no effect. The Americans returned fire with a few rounds of their own, but Dewey had made it clear to his commanding officers that the squadron would not stop to fight it out with the shore batteries but would remain focused on the objective—the Spanish fleet.<sup>50</sup> Safely past the shore batteries and seeing no threat of the rumored Spanish mines, the American squadron had now only to wait for the sun and seek out and destroy the Spanish fleet, a task that it carried out with little difficulty and no loss of American life.

#### DEWEY USHERS IN AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

When the Spanish-American War began, the strategic American objective was to liberate Cuba from alleged Spanish atrocities, not to gain colonial possessions.<sup>51</sup> That objective decisively shifted three days after the defeat of the Spanish Pacific fleet, when Dewey cabled to Secretary Long, "We control bay completely and can take city at any time, but have not sufficient men to hold."<sup>52</sup> The prospect of seizing territory had not been seriously considered by the McKinley administration, but Dewey's cable prompted the mobilization of additional forces to do just that. Two significant challenges faced Dewey. First, the Filipinos were mounting an insurgency against the Spanish forces occupying the countryside around Manila. Second, ships of the powerful German navy were conspicuously patrolling the waters adjacent to Manila Bay, threatening to claim the Philippines for their nation.<sup>53</sup>

Almost immediately following Montojo's defeat, Spanish general Don Basilio, realizing the hopelessness of his situation, had communicated through intermediaries his willingness to surrender his thirty-one thousand troops to Dewey's squadron.<sup>54</sup> Dewey was unwilling to accept the offer, fearful that his lack of sufficient occupation forces would prompt looting and widespread bloodshed of Spaniards at the hands of the Filipino insurgents. Accordingly, he waited for American expeditionary troops under the command of Major General Wesley Merritt, U.S. Army, to arrive.

Even as Dewey was declining the offer of Spanish surrender, exiled Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo arrived in Manila Bay seeking to create a native, independent government under American advisers.<sup>55</sup> Realizing that the growing number of native insurgents could be of assistance in pushing the Spanish forces from their garrison into the city of Manila, Dewey assisted Aguinaldo by allowing the insurgents the use of captured Spanish guns and ammunition; he was careful, however, not to forge an alliance that might imply recognition of a Filipino state.<sup>56</sup> Unhindered by Dewey, a band of a thousand Filipino insurgents drove the nearly thirteen thousand Spaniards from their garrison on 29 May, forcing their withdrawal to Manila. Emboldened by his success, Aguinaldo now proclaimed establishment of the "First Republic of the Philippines," with himself as dictator. Dewey, despite his delicate and conditional support of Aguinaldo, faced a major problem: three separate authorities were now attempting to exercise rule over the Philippines.<sup>57</sup>

When Merritt arrived with 8,500 troops in early August, Dewey continued his negotiations for a Spanish surrender. He eventually obtained an agreement with Don Basilio's successor, General Firmin Jaudenes, that Spanish forces would surrender, provided they faced an American assault—Jaudenes's "honor demanded that." As Dewey later recalled, "So I had to fire, to kill a few people."<sup>58</sup> The agreement thus made, Dewey and Merritt carried out what amounted to a staged joint attack from land and sea on 10 August, prompting a swift Spanish surrender. With the Spaniards out of the power struggle, the Americans would shift their focus to Aguinaldo and embark on a counterinsurgency campaign that would ultimately prove lengthy, costly, and bloody. Recognizing that a counterinsurgency campaign required professional diplomacy as well as military might, Dewey wrote his friend, Senator Redfield Proctor of Vermont, "This appears to me an occasion for the triumph of statesmanship rather than of arms."<sup>59</sup>

To prevent the Germans from clawing their way into the power vacuum, Dewey established a naval blockade of Manila Bay. Despite initially having far fewer ships than the Germans would ultimately operate in the region, the Americans enforced the blockade with an aggressiveness that prompted cooperation from most foreign naval vessels. Numerous situations developed between

American and German warships that risked open conflict, but Dewey repeatedly distinguished himself as a highly effective diplomat, balancing resolve with delicacy, projecting strength without heavy-handedness.<sup>60</sup>

If Dewey's skillful diplomacy with the Japanese, Germans, Spaniards, British, and Filipinos is somewhat surprising in view of his reputation for boldness, so too was his perception of the importance of what are now known as "information operations" during an age that gave rise to muckraking and "yellow journalism." John Barrett, a newspaper correspondent who was embarked on board *Olympia* from May 1898 to March 1899, later described Dewey as lenient in his press censorship, adding that nobody "could rival the Admiral in quick perception of what was permissible news and what was not, together with the rare faculty of showing the correspondent with unfailing urbanity why this or that sentence should be changed or omitted."<sup>61</sup> An example of his keen awareness of the value of public perception occurred during preparations for the joint staged attack on Manila. After reviewing a proposed release that referred to the pending "bombardment" of the city, Dewey recommended instead the phrase "reduce the defenses of the city." He explained, "It is necessary for us to remember that we are making history. If we left in words which implied no respect for noncombatants, women and children and property, we would be censured for it by the future historian."<sup>62</sup>

## DEWEY'S RELEVANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The term "operational art"—the theory and practice of preparing for and conducting military operations on land, at sea, and in the air—was coined by the Russians in the 1920s, more than two decades after Dewey's victory at Manila Bay.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, there is little argument that Dewey essentially practiced operational art in the design of his campaign plan in the western Pacific. What makes Dewey's success relevant today is not his textbook use of Mahanian tactics but his careful and deliberate crafting of a battle plan that mitigated sizable deficiencies in the operational factors of space, force, and time. Several recent conflicts have shown that Dewey's approach remains prudent.

Take, for example, Dewey's resourcefulness in combating his logistical difficulties and lack of cargo-lift capacity. Faced with similar problems preparing for the Falklands War of 1982, the British did exactly as Dewey did, chartering containerships, commercial tankers, and cruise liners to transport cargo, fuel, and troops eight thousand miles from the United Kingdom to the Falklands theater.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the British decision to leave behind wheeled vehicles to maximize loading space for tracked vehicles echoes of Dewey's efforts to sacrifice less critical supplies for vital ammunition on board *Concord*.<sup>65</sup>

Vego observes, “Intelligence should provide the operational commander timely, accurate, and relevant information about the enemy forces’ order of battle . . . and capabilities, and the enemy’s critical strengths and weaknesses.”<sup>66</sup> Dewey’s energetic “intelligence preparation of the battlefield,” though he had practically no professional intelligence resources, paved the way for his success. Of particular importance was Dewey’s careful consideration of rumors of mines, and his ultimate (and correct) dismissal of them as a ruse. The failure to ascertain enemy capabilities accurately, despite vastly superior intelligence capabilities than Dewey enjoyed, has proved disastrous to many modern commanders. Dewey, dissecting the Spanish disinformation campaign and comprehensively war-gaming every potential Spanish course of action, avoided falling into the trap of postponing his attack due to overestimating the strength of his enemy. In essence, Dewey knew his enemy and knew when to press the issue to preclude the Spaniards from reinforcing or further constructing shore defenses.

A 13 August 2010 *New York Times* article observed, “Mastery of battlefield tactics and a knack for leadership are only prerequisites. Generals and other top officers are now expected to be city managers, cultural ambassadors, public relations whizzes and politicians as they deal with multiple missions and constituencies in the war zone, in allied capitals—and at home.”<sup>67</sup> Dewey, it appears, was ahead of his time. His astute media awareness, coupled with the delicacy with which he handled myriad political and cultural sensitivities, should serve as an example for modern-day military leaders facing an increasingly complex security environment in an age of globalism.

Perhaps most important, modern students should seriously question Andidora’s assertion that Dewey’s material advantages in age and capability of his ships somehow guaranteed success at Manila Bay. History is rife with examples of superior forces falling to inferior ones. The American Revolutionary War, the Japanese invasion of Malaya in 1941, and Midway in 1942 were all “underdog” victories. Advantages in the operational factor of force have often been offset by the hubris of reliance on sheer numbers or technology rather than careful and deliberate planning to identify and exploit weaknesses. Vego argues, “Experience shows that no new technologies, no matter how advanced, can replace operational art,” adding that “the excessive focus on tactics of platforms and weapons/sensors reduces all fighting to simple targeting and shooting.”<sup>68</sup> Dewey’s careful application of operational art despite material advantages over his adversaries ensured that his forces remained focused on the enemy’s center of gravity while offsetting Spanish critical strengths.

Finally, Dewey’s performance as an operational leader is worthy of careful consideration. The 2010 U.S. Joint Forces Command *Joint Operating Environment*

observes, “Those commanders who have listened and absorbed what their subordinates had to say were those who recognized what was actually happening in combat, because they had acculturated themselves to learning from the experiences of others.”<sup>69</sup> Dewey’s collaborative approach to planning for war, an approach that drew heavily from the inputs of his subordinates, supports this observation. A collective MIT, Carnegie Mellon, and Union College research effort yielded a 2010 report that concluded, among other things, “In groups where one person dominated, the group was less collectively intelligent than in groups where the conversational turns were more evenly distributed.”<sup>70</sup> Arguably, Dewey’s willingness to *participate in*, rather than dominate, planning, notwithstanding his positional authority and bold predisposition, was the critical enabler of his success. With the adoption of the 2007 *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* and its underlying emphasis on international partnership and shared responsibility, that quality is becoming increasingly important.

There can be no mistaking that experience matters in the development of our military leaders. Dewey’s experience, particularly his participation in the American Civil War, provided him with real-world tactical expertise as well as a highly successful role model to emulate. The forging of similar leaders in that way in today’s Navy is problematic due to the dearth of naval conflicts since the conclusion of World War II. This reality underscores the importance of “providing the education so that future leaders can understand the political, strategic, historical, and cultural framework of a more complex world, as well as possess a thorough grounding in the nature of war, past, present, and future.”<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, future leaders in the U.S. Navy must continue studying historical applications of operational art. In doing so, they would be wise not to overlook Dewey.

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#### NOTES

1. David Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998), p. 137.
2. Craig L. Symonds, *Decision at Sea: Five Naval Battles That Shaped American History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), p. 143.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
4. Ronald Andidora, *Iron Admirals: Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2000), p. 9.
5. Laurin Hall Healy and Luis Kutner, *The Admiral* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis, 1944), p. 181.
6. H. W. Wilson, *The Downfall of Spain: Naval History of the Spanish-American War* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1900), p. 141.
7. John Barrett, “Admiral George Dewey,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 99 (June–November 1899), p. 801.
8. Lisle A. Rose, *Power at Sea: The Age of Navalism 1890–1918* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2007), p. 16.
9. George Dewey, *Autobiography of George Dewey: Admiral of the Navy* (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), p. 178. Dewey’s account is disputed by William Braisted, who suggests



- Dewey did not assemble his squadron in Hong Kong until directed to by Roosevelt on 25 February 1898; William Reynolds Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1897–1909* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1959), p. 23.
10. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 160, refers to the drafting in 1895 of plans for war with Spain by students at the Naval War College, in Newport, R.I., calling for the U.S. Asiatic Squadron to attack the Philippines. Braisted cites subsequent plans drafted in 1896 by Lt. William W. Kimball calling for the establishment of a base of supply at Manila in the event of war with Spain; Braisted, *United States Navy in the Pacific*, pp. 21–22. Despite the existence of general war plans for the U.S. Navy action in the Philippines, it remained Dewey's responsibility to devise and implement specific details associated with operations and logistics.
  11. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 163.
  12. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 175.
  13. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 184.
  14. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 203.
  15. Ibid.
  16. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 168; Dewey, *Autobiography*, pp. 187, 192.
  17. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 192.
  18. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 166; Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 192.
  19. Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2007), p. X-13.
  20. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 140.
  21. Ibid., p. 68.
  22. S. S. Robison, *A History of Naval Tactics from 1530 to 1930: The Evolution of Tactical Maxims* (Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute, 1942), p. 651.
  23. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 50.
  24. Nathan Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation, 1947), p. 4.
  25. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 170.
  26. Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, p. 5; Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 170.
  27. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 140; Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 171.
  28. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 140.
  29. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 171.
  30. Ibid., p. 191; Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 162.
  31. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 192.
  32. Wilson, *Downfall of Spain*, p. 121.
  33. Ibid., p. 122.
  34. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 180.
  35. Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, p. 14.
  36. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 187.
  37. Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, p. 15.
  38. David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 98–99; Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 157; Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 199.
  39. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 157.
  40. Barrett, "Admiral George Dewey," p. 801.
  41. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 171.
  42. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 190.
  43. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 165. The four "protected cruisers" in the force were armored only to the extent of protection of their machinery spaces from plunging fire.
  44. Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, p. 22.
  45. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 175.
  46. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 208.
  47. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 171; Trask, *War with Spain in 1898*, p. 101.
  48. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 146.
  49. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 207.
  50. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 146.
  51. Trask, *War with Spain in 1898*, p. 95.
  52. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 195.
  53. Germany posed a problem not just in the Philippines following Dewey's victory but also to U.S. interests in the Samoan Islands. Braisted provides a brief overview of the acrimony between the United States and Germany over Pacific interests in *United States Navy in the Pacific*, pp. 57–63.



54. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 273.
55. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 222.
56. Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 247.
57. Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, p. 186.
58. Traxel, 1898, p. 224; Dewey, *Autobiography*, p. 275.
59. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 239. The Philippine insurrection that followed Dewey's victory is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is noteworthy that Dewey advocated a liberal policy with the native Filipinos that would increase their privileges and capacity for self-government. Dewey strongly urged a diplomatic solution to the insurgency rather than a military one. This opinion stood in stark contrast with that of Maj. Gen. E. S. Otis, the commanding U.S. Army general, who advocated subduing the Philippine Islands with twenty-five thousand troops and a military government. Recent events have shown the merits of Dewey's position and the limits of Otis's. For a more detailed discussion see Braisted's *United States Navy in the Pacific*, pp. 64–75.
60. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, pp. 207–209; Braisted, *United States Navy in the Pacific*, p. 37.
61. Barrett, "Admiral George Dewey," p. 806.
62. Healy and Kutner, *Admiral*, p. 231.
63. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, p. I-5.
64. Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflicts* (London: Brassey's, 1991), p. 257.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
66. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, p. VIII-28.
67. Thom Shanker, "Win Wars? Today's Generals Must Also Politick and Do P.R.," *New York Times*, 13 August 2010.
68. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, pp. xvii–xviii.
69. U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2010* (Suffolk, Va.: 28 February 2010), p. 72, available at [www.jfcom.mil/](http://www.jfcom.mil/).
70. "Collective Intelligence: Number of Women in Groups Linked to Effectiveness in Solving Difficult Problems," *Science Daily*, 30 September 2010.
71. U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment 2010*, p. 70.

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